

JUNIOR COLLEGES IN OKLAHOMA

*By Frank A. Balyeat**

The junior college movement in Oklahoma dates back before World War I. In fact, the past quarter-century includes the rise and development of most of these schools,—public, church, and private. In general, the State schools have been the most permanent and steady in their growth. The local, public schools have been called “municipal,” though this term is not accurate, since it is the district and not the town in it that controls the school. The group of municipal schools, upper growth of the high schools in these towns, has witnessed too little planning and resultant uncertainty and instability. Church schools, of avowed junior college nature, have been few, though several denominational colleges have at some time or other confined their offering to the lower division. Private ventures in the junior college field have been almost absent from the Oklahoma picture.

With the rounding out of the first quarter-century of junior colleges in Oklahoma the time has come to shape this movement into a planned program. So far little attempt has been made in long-range planning or in legislation to make the junior colleges an integral part of secondary and higher education. A brief review of what we now have at this level of schooling and how the present situation arose should be helpful in planning for the critical years just ahead.

We find three kinds of these schools: (1) municipal (the local, public schools) junior colleges, of one or two years offering, parts of the district systems of towns; (2) State schools, usually serving a fairly well-defined region and designed, in the main, for special types of schooling; and (3) independent institutions, including church and private schools. Numerically they come in the order just named.

Municipal Junior Colleges

Since the Muskogee Junior College began in the fall of 1920 a total of 35 Oklahoma towns have extended their local schools upward by offering one or two years of college work. Always there was the intent of offering the second year as soon as there was sufficient demand. Most of these schools have been small, often too small for effective work or continued existence. Their rise has sometimes been due to prevailing conditions, economic or other, and in part to the ambition or energy of a dean, superintendent, board of education, or chamber of commerce.

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The accompanying map shows their geographical distribution and their relation to State and church colleges. Location has much to do with the need for a municipal junior college and the resultant support. This table shows the time when these schools began, how long continued, and the years when each operated:

DATES OF ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF MUNICIPAL JUNIOR COLLEGES

1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1938
1. Chickasha (1) 1924-25	*1. Altus (23) 1925-48	1. Chandler (3) 1933-36	*1. Carnegie (6) 1938-42 & 1946-48
2. Elk City (1) 1924-25	*2. Bartlesville (18) 1927-43 & 1946-48	2. Drumright (3) 1934-37	2. Duncan (5) 1937-42
3. Frederick (7) 1922-25 & 1938-42	*3. Bristow (12) 1928-29, 1933-42, & 1946-48	3. Henryetta (1) 1932-33	*3. El Reno (10) 1938-48
*4. Hobart (15) 1923-25 & 1935-48	4. Okemah (11) 1926-28 & 1933-41	4. Holdenville (6) 1933-36 & 1939-42	4. Hollis (1) 1937-38
5. Lawton (3) 1922-25	5. Okmulgee (21) 1926-47	5. Sapulpa (10) 1932-42	*5. Mangum (9) 1937-44 & 1946-48
6. McAlester (3) 1922-23, 1925-26, & 1930-31	6. Ponca City (1) 1929-30	*6. Seminole (17) 1931-48	6. Oklahoma City (Capitol Hill) (10) 1935-45
*7. Muskogee (28) 1920-48		7. Wewoka (3) 1933-35 & 1946-47	7. Pawhuska (2) 1936-38
8. Pauls Valley (4) 1924-28		*8. Wetumka (12) 1932-37, 1938-43, & 1946-48	8. Pawnee (3) 1935-38
		9. Woodward (14) 1932-44 & 1945-47	*9. Poteau (7) 1935-37 & 1943-48
			10. Pryor (1) 1938-39
			*11. Sayre (6) 1938-42 & 1946-48
			12. Shidler (7) 1936-43

*Starred towns are operating municipal junior colleges in the spring of 1948.

For convenience these 35 municipal schools are grouped under four lists, as shown in the table. Each column is for a five-year period except the fourth, which concludes with 1938, the last year that any of them was organized. Between 1920 and 1938 only three years (1921, 1929, and 1930) did not add at least one. The figures in parentheses following the name of a town shows the number of years that it had a junior college, not always continuously, and the dates below show the years when it maintained such a school.

In the first five years eight towns organized junior colleges. Two of these, Chickasha and Lawton, necessarily discontinued soon, due to nearness of State schools. Both Frederick and McAlester made more than one effort before giving up. Elk City quit at the end of one year and Pauls Valley continued four years. Only two of the eight existed at the beginning of 1925-26. Of this group only Hobart and Muskogee are operating in the spring of 1948, the latter resuming in 1935 after a lapse of ten years.

Six new schools were started in 1925 to 1929. Four of these are operating today and the fifth closed at the end of 1946-47 after running for 21 years. Altus, starting in 1925, is second only to Muskogee in length of existence. Ponca City tried only one year; Okemah, in two attempts, ran for a total of 11 years. Bartlesville and Bristow both shut down during the war but have been in operation since 1946. Okmulgee, one of the pioneers in Oklahoma, discontinued in 1947 when the local A & M College branch increasingly cared for some of the need previously met.

The half-decade of depression saw nine new schools begin, only two of which still exist. Four of them were short lived, Henryetta closing at the end of the first year and Chandler, Drumright, and Wewoka operating three years each, the last named after two tries. Holdenville, with six years, and Sapulpa, with ten, made longer efforts. Woodward operated a total of fourteen years, but did not re-open after being closed by a tornado in the spring of 1947. Wetumka made its third start in 1946 and is still operating. Of this group only Seminole has had continuous existence.

The four-year period of 1935-1939 was the most prolific, twelve schools starting then. Four of them are running in 1947-48, though not all of them having had continuous existence. Only Hollis and Pryor closed after one year, Pawhuska ran two years, and Pawnee closed after a three-year trial. Duncan, with five years, Oklahoma City (Capitol Hill), with ten, and Shidler, with seven, all closed with the opening of the war and have not re-opened. Carnegie, Mangum, Poteau, and Sayre all resumed within the past five years and are still operating. Only El Reno of this group, has existed continuously from date of organization.

The peak of the junior college growth, so far as number of schools was concerned, came in 1938-39, though the next two years were very close seconds. War threats and attending conditions caused another slight drop and the number continued to decrease until it reached a low of seven in 1945-46. Post-war conditions raised it to fifteen in 1946-47, with a drop to twelve in the current year. What the immediate future will be with respect to number and size of municipal junior colleges will depend upon economic conditions and on the ability of senior colleges to instruct and house those who wish to attend, especially the veterans and the young women. Also, the effectiveness of work done by each of these schools will play a large part in holding students through the first year and into the second and in attracting new students.

The terminal concept of municipal junior college work is growing slowly in Oklahoma, more slowly than in some other states. Both at home and at the senior colleges, whither most of these students are now bound, the idea prevails that this study, conveniently and less expensively done nearer home, is but to prepare for second or third

year of college work or for vocational training to be done elsewhere later.

These municipal junior colleges have sometimes been substandard, due to smaller enrollment than will permit effective work. According to the reports of the State Department of Education up to and including 1943-44, the enrollments ran from 10 to 287, the latter figure being that of Altus in 1943. Several schools reported at some time or other fewer than 20 enrolled, usually those schools that were short lived. Sometimes these were in the smaller towns or in those fairly convenient to state or church colleges. The average enrollment for all the reports for the years included was about 70 and the median a little over 40. The relatively large number of little schools lowered the median significantly below the average.

For nearly two decades these municipal junior colleges operated without any explicit legal sanction, but with obvious public approval. The senior high school building has been shared, as has the staff, the expense being proportioned. The college share has been borne by tuition. In the past two years veterans have made up a large part of the enrollment in most of these schools, the federal money received being largely responsible for the existence and the size of some of them. When economic depression or when crowded conditions in the four-year colleges makes it difficult to attend schools further away from home, these local schools serve both their own districts and surrounding areas in caring for many who can not get into State or church schools or who can not afford to attend them.

In 1939 permissive legislation was enacted by the State. The bill merely legalized the practice of nearly twenty years. In recent legislatures some attempt has been made to get a beginning of State aid for these schools. Sentiment has grown in favor of this assistance and apparently the development of a systematic program and improvement of standards are needed before argument can be made sufficiently convincing to secure the needed and deserved State help.

In the beginning of this movement the recognition of credits earned was assured by advance approval of instructors and of library and laboratory facilities by the departments concerned at either the Oklahoma A & M College or the University of Oklahoma. Later a committee of three, made up of a faculty member from each of these institutions and a member from the State Department of Education, loosely supervised these local schools and provided a plan for recognition of their credits. In the spring of 1946 a committee of ten was organized to accredit and supervise the municipal, church, and private junior colleges of Oklahoma. It consists of two members from each of the two institutions mentioned above, appointed by their presidents; two from the staff of the Regents for Higher Education; and two from the State Department of Education. These eight choose a superintendent from each of two towns then operating

a junior college. These ten visit public as well as church and private schools annually or oftener, if needed, to make recommendations as to accrediting and strengthening their work.

State Junior Colleges

Very early in the history of the State, Oklahoma provided regional schools for the training of youth in the agricultural, mechanical, business, and domestic arts. At that time these schools were designed to supplement the inadequate high school opportunities in many parts of the State.

The First Legislature provided that as soon as possible such a school should be established in each of the judicial districts. Soon the Panhandle District was added, making six of these regional schools of secondary rank. Upper elementary grades were included and high school work was added as the enrollment demanded.

Two of these schools did not outlive the first decade of statehood. Connell, at Helena, and Haskell, at Broken Arrow, were officially closed before offering any college work. The Panhandle College grew through junior college status and the Eighth Legislature changed its name and nature to that of a degree granting college. That left three of the original six.

These three continued to grow and gradually to drop their lower grade offerings, becoming regional secondary schools, specializing in the lines needed by boys and girls from the farms and not adequately or conveniently served by high schools. The offerings gradually rose to include some at the college level.

In 1922 the Murray State School of Agriculture, at Tishomingo, was given legal junior college status. In the next five years the other two were thus officially designated. These were the Cameron State Agricultural College, at Lawton, and Conners State Agricultural College at Warner, near Muskogee. These have continued to function as junior colleges and have served especially in the areas of subject matter and for the regions for which they were planned. To these services have been added that of arts and science offerings to accompany the specialized training and for pre-professional preparation.

Besides these three agricultural schools, two other State junior colleges have been added, but under different circumstances. Both of them began as schools of mines. Opening in 1910 as the Oklahoma School of Mines, the school at Wilburton ran until World War I, when its doors were closed until 1920. Then it opened again, this time to train discharged veterans in the practical arts. Through the 1920's it struggled intermittently, always with uncertain future. In 1927 the legislature gave it a four-year college status again. Its nature was stabilized by the Seventeenth Legislature and for nearly

a decade it has operated as Eastern Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.

The school at Miami began in 1919 as the Miami School of Mines, its name changed in 1925 to Northeastern Junior College. For the first twenty years it was governed by a separate board but in 1939 was placed under the Board of Regents of the State Colleges. In 1943 it came under the Board of Regents for Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges and is now directed by that body, as are the schools at Lawton, Tishomingo, Warner, and Wilburton. Its name is now Northeastern Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.

Northern Oklahoma Junior College, at Tonkawa, has the oldest total existence of any of Oklahoma's junior colleges. It began in 1901 as the University Preparatory School, as which it ran for nearly two decades. In 1920 some college work was added and in 1941 it was legally established as the Northern Oklahoma Junior College. Business and other practical arts are stressed.

The Oklahoma Military Academy, at Claremore, began in 1909 as the Eastern Oklahoma Preparatory School, changing in 1919 to a military academy with both high school and junior college divisions. Only boys are admitted and the work is designed to give both military training and varied work in the first two college years, as well as in high school. Like the school at Tonkawa, it has its own governing board.

As one reads these condensed reviews of the seven State colleges now operating, he is struck with the fact that through the years Oklahoma has not definitely planned a program of public junior colleges. Not one of them started as a junior college. For various reasons and through varied and uncertain experiences, they have come to fill a valuable and important place in the State's educational plan. The time has come when Oklahoma's experience and that of other states should be utilized in careful, long-range planning to fit the present facilities into the pattern of what will be needed for the years ahead.

Independent Junior Colleges

From time to time several of the church schools in Oklahoma, both in territorial days and since, have really been junior colleges. Some of them grew through that status into degree-granting schools. Others have discontinued upper division work and have become junior colleges in fact, if not in name.

At Durant the Oklahoma Presbyterian College for Girls served the Indian girls at the junior college level. In recent years it has become a dormitory for these girls, transporting them for their instruction to Southeastern State College.

St. Gregory, near Shawnee, has instructed boys and men at various levels of work, changing upward and downward through the years. At one time it gave four years of college work, then for several years was listed as an accredited junior college. Recently only secondary work is offered. It is a Catholic institution.

At Tulsa, Monte Cassino was established as a junior college for girls, a branch of the Catholic College for Girls, located at Guthrie. No college work is given at present.

Bacone College began in 1880, operating first at Tahlequah and then at Muskogee. Its level of offering has been up and down through the years, at one time including four-year programs. It serves Indian boys and girls of many tribes from several states. Since 1927 it has definitely been on a junior college basis. It is controlled by the Northern Baptist Board.

Pentecostal Holiness College, at Oklahoma City, and Apostolic College, at Tulsa, have begun since World War II. They are working toward accredited status.

The Spartan School of Aeronautical Engineering, at Tulsa, is the only private junior college in Oklahoma. It gives vocational training and is accredited for the first two years of work in aeronautical engineering.